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Governor Announces \$1.3 Million in WIRED Grant Awards

(HELENA) – Governor Brian Schweitzer today announced that five Montana organizations have been awarded more than \$1.3 million-dollars in grants from the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development Program (WIRED).

Grant recipients include: Sustainable Systems, LLC; Fort Peck Tribes; Peaks and Prairies, LLC; Western Bio-Products Innovation Center; and Ethanol Producers and Consumers of Montana, Inc (EPAC).

“These WIRED awards are helping fund cutting edge operations in Montana’s bio-product industry,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “All of the recipients are devoted to expanding the economic base of bio-products in Eastern Montana, and these grants will allow Montana to advance to the next level.”

In January, 2006, the US Department of Labor announced that Governor Schweitzer’s application for Montana’s WIRED proposal was one of 13 approved out of over 90 applications nationwide. Montana’s WIRED program is focused on developing the bio-products industry and general job creation, in 32 counties of Eastern Montana and six Indian Reservations.

The WIRED Executive Steering Committee appointed by the Governor selects applicants qualified to receive WIRED funds. The Committee consists of members from the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and the Office of Higher Education.

Adam de Yong is the WIRED Project Director of the WIRED Administrative Office, through the Department of Labor and Industry. Nancy Guccione is the WIRED Program Manager through the Department of Commerce.

The Montana Department of Commerce is managing a grant program under contract with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, to implement part of the WIRED proposal. Grants are used to fund direct bio-product business training assistance, job training programs and curriculum development. Each grant recipient must first complete training, before WIRED funds are awarded.

WIRED Grant Awards:

Sustainable Systems, LLC: \$700,000

This oil seed crushing plant is located in Culbertson. The award will be used for direct training of employees in conjunction with a large remodel and equipment upgrade.

Sustainable Systems, LLC currently employees 15 full time employees and will add an additional 39 employees as a result of the grant. The company will leverage the grant funds with an additional \$3 million dollars in matching funds.

Fort Peck Tribes: \$150,000

This award will be managed by Fort Peck Community College in Poplar. The funds will be used to train no less than 25 unemployed individuals to be prepared for opportunities in the bio-product related industry within the WIRED area. No match is required for this application, but Fort Peck does have an estimated \$200,000 in funding to supplement the grant.

Peaks and Prairies, LLC: \$410,000

This bio-refinery crushes oil crops grown by members and refines the oils into bio-lubricants. The award will be used to train 27 new full time employees in conjunction with a state of the art equipment upgrade. The company will leverage the grant funds with an additional \$3 million dollars in matching funds.

Western Bio-Products Innovation Center: \$49,732

The goal will be to assist developing food companies in the 32-county region via the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center located in Ronan, to ultimately build processing capacity in their communities that produce significant value-added products from Montana agriculture and create living wage jobs that are filled with a trained workforce.

Ethanol Producers and Consumers of Montana: \$87,500

This non-profit mutual benefit corporation has 150 active members and is located in Nashua. This award will be used to fund a series of workshops to train employees and businesses on providing education, information and referral services to promote the bio-fuel industry. As a result of the grant, EPAC will hire a training coordinator and training assistant. The company will leverage the grant funds with approximately \$190,000 in matching funds.

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